

VZCZCXRO0754
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHNM #0234/01 0961614
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 061614Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4946
INFO RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 3501
RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0063
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0807
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000234

DEPT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, AND DRL/EA
PARIS FOR AF WATCHER
PLS PASS TO USAID FOR AFR/W

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEN](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [NG](#)

SUBJECT: VISIT OF PRESIDENT SARKOZY; PRESIDENT TANDJA'S REMARKS
KEEP POLITICAL SUCCESSION A CONTROVERSY

Ref: a) Niamey 00214, b) 08 Niamey 01176, d) 08 Niamey 01179, d) 08 Niamey 01111

NIAMEY 00000234 001.2 OF 002

¶1. On March 27, French President Sarkozy paid a four-hour visit to Niger, where he met with President Tandja to strengthen the "strategic partnership." Sarkozy also met with the National Council for Political Dialogue (CNDP), the country's political elite, with whom he discussed governance issues and praised Niger's political stability over the past ten years. He then met with local representatives of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), who have criticized French firm Areva's activities in uranium mining as having a negative impact on the environment and the health and rights of communities living in its operating zone (Note: EITI issues covered in septel. End note.) Sarkozy underscored the mutual benefits of the long-term contract between Areva and Niger, referring to it as a win-win venture. The two heads of state held a joint press conference to conclude the visit.

Pres. Tandja: No to Third Mandate, Maybe to Extension

¶2. During the press conference, President Tandja declared that he would step down at the end of his mandate, unless "the people" ask him to stay. When asked whether he would seek to amend the constitution and seek a third term, Tandja said, "I feel comfortable to address this issue today...I highly respect our constitution. I led a military career, and learned my country's laws and regulations as a soldier. Then [as a politician] I learned about the constitution. I loved democracy...I became president and served two terms, now coming to an end. An elevated act for me is to step down with my head high...I am not seeking another mandate...Not for a single moment did I ask any Nigerien for a way to do this or that. I will never ask Nigeriens to have me change anything or to seek amendments to our constitution... [However] regions expressed an opinion requesting a three year's [extension] for the President to complete the development projects that he had started, for purposes of stability...This matter concerns the people and the National Assembly." Then Tandja concluded, "It is up to [the people and the National Assembly] to decide. As for me, I am ready to leave at the end of my mandate, next December 22. I will retire."

Missions, Stability, and Completing Work Underway

¶3. In an interview in Hausa on international media, President Tandja explained that he had been an army officer, and in military culture, an officer never failed to accomplish a mission. On March 28, in an editorial on national television, Iboune Gueye, the head of the government communication unit said, "Tandja will not violate the constitution." He cited President Sarkozy, who said that, "Since Niger's independence, about 50 years ago, there were five Republics, several coups, and one assassinated president. The only period of democracy and stability was during President Tandja's two terms, and this is a fact that nobody denies." Gueye added, "However, the people will decide" whether it would like to see the president continue the good work for Niger's people's welfare. The Minister of Communication and Government Spokesman Mohamed Ben Omar also indicated on international media that the president should be given a chance to complete the projects that he had started.

Civil Society Answers Back in Opposition to Extension

4.Civil society quickly responded, stating that any ove to extend the presidential mandate beyond the two terms provided by the constitution would be illegal and would be opposed. Civil society representatives further thought that President Tandja should not equate the few supporters of "tazartche" (Hausa for "let it continue") with the Nigerien people as a whole.

¶5. Former state prosecutor and former Minister of Justice Soli Abdourahamane said, "The constitution has established the rules of the game, independently from any construction project." Issa Moussa, a political analyst, said, "You can never finish a country's work. You can only contribute to it... Statesmen come and go, the country is always there." Opposition Member of Parliament Kalla Ankouraou noted that the constitution clearly states that some of

NIAMEY 00000234 002.2 OF 002

its provisions - including the president's term of office - cannot be amended. Issoufou Tamboura, Information Secretary for the MNSD ruling party, however, thought that the people should pressure the National Assembly to find a solution that would allow President Tandja to "continue his good work."

Comment

¶6. President Tandja, through his recent meetings with the UN envoy and political parties, and the establishment of the CENI, has given a strong signal that the government will organize elections in 2009. Some analysts, however, regard his ambiguous remarks as perhaps reflecting an ulterior motive, and that his March 27 remarks may fall along the lines of those made on March 14 during the visit of Libyan President and AU Chairman Qadahfy.

¶7. Minimize considered.
WHITAKER